

**Grace and peace to you from our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

“What Are the Means of Grace and What Do They Do for Us?”

by Teagan Schwarz

Ephesians 2:8-9 states, **For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.** By His great love and mercy, God sent His Son to earth to take our sins on Himself and suffer our punishment and die for us. By Jesus’ perfect life and death on the cross we have been given forgiveness, new life, and salvation. The Means of Grace are the means by which we receive these blessings. The Means of Grace are the gospel given through the Word and Sacraments. These Means of Grace build and strengthen faith through the work of the Holy Spirit. These blessings are given to us by God, and are things God does for us, not things we do for God.

The first sacrament we learned about was Holy Baptism. In our classes this year, we defined a sacrament as a sacred act with three characteristics. The first characteristic is that it is established by Jesus Christ. We read in Matthew 28:18-20: **Jesus came to [His disciples] and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you, to the very end of the age.**

The second characteristic of a sacrament is that it includes an earthly element that is connected to God’s Word. The earthly element in Baptism is water. It is connected to the Word of God spoken at Baptism, **I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,** just as Jesus commanded in Matthew 28, it is connected to the Word because it was instituted by God.

The final characteristic of a sacrament is that it offers, gives, and seals the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. How can we be sure that Baptism does this for us? In Acts 2:38, Peter says to the people, **Repent and be baptized, everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit.** The Bible assures and reassures us that the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts and that we are given these blessings of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

The other sacrament is Holy Communion, also called the Lord’s Supper. It was established by Jesus Christ at the Last Supper the night before He died. Luke 22:19-20 says: **He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.** The earthly elements used in Holy Communion are bread and wine. They are connected to God’s Word through the words of Christ Himself, which the pastor speaks while distributing the bread and wine. He repeats Jesus’ words: **Take and eat; this is My body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me,** as well as **Take and drink; this is My blood of the new covenant poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of Me.** In the Lord’s Supper, we do not just receive bread and wine, we receive Jesus’ body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine. Just like Baptism, the Lord’s Supper offers, gives, and seals forgiveness, life, and salvation.

The Word, as well as the sacraments, strengthens and builds our faith. God’s Word, recorded in the Bible, includes both the message of the Law and the Gospel. The Law shows us our sin, while the Gospel tells us the message of our forgiveness. It is of utmost importance for us to listen to God’s Word and read the Bible. Coming to church or a Bible study session and listening to a pastor teach us about the Word, or partaking in personal devotions helps to strengthen our faith in God and in His promises. Promises which are summarized in John 3:16: **God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.** By God’s grace, the Holy Spirit works this faith in our hearts, through His Means of Grace.

Those Means ensure us of our forgiveness, God's promise of eternal life for believers, and our salvation from sin. Through them, the Holy Spirit builds and strengthens faith in our hearts. When I am confirmed, I am declaring that I share the same beliefs as the other members of the church. As Christians, we are thankful that God has given us these blessings, but we must remember not to neglect gathering together, participating in the sacraments, and studying the Word, since we need the Holy Spirit to continue working faith in our hearts. We are motivated to do as God has commanded us due to His love and mercy for us when Jesus died on the cross.

“By Grace Alone, By Scripture Alone, By Faith Alone”  
by Ryan Liero

“Sola Gratia, Sola Scriptura, Sola Fide”. These are the Latin words for grace alone, Scripture alone, and faith alone.... the basis for what will determine what happens to a believer when they die. When a person dies, they go to either heaven or hell. Believers go to heaven, and unbelievers go to hell. But believers in what? What exactly are we to believe in if we want eternal life?

I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth. When God created the world, even before He created the world, He knew He would send His Son into the world to save me. God the Father showed us grace when He sent His Son to die on the cross to save us from our sins, in order for us to be heirs of eternal life. Without God's grace, we would have nothing! Grace is the divine love that God shows us, it is undeserved love. His grace also saves us. In Ephesians 2:8-9, the Bible says, **For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.** God shows His grace everyday by providing us with everything we need, and He shows us His grace through the forgiveness of sin. We not deserve it, nor can we earn it.

I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified, died, and was buried. On the third day He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven where He is seated at the right hand of the Father. John 1:1 states, **In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.** Jesus is the Word; the basis of the Christian faith. John 1:14 says, **The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.** Jesus, who is God, became human for us, to save us from our sins. He needed to be human so He could be our substitute, living under God's law. He had to be God that He might still never sin despite all of the temptations of this world. He had to be a man so that He could die in our place. He needed to be God so He could rise from the death and so that His death would be valuable enough to save us from our sins.

The Bible was written by prophets and disciples of Jesus, but the Holy Spirit gave them the words to write. The second book of Timothy 3:16 says, **All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.** The Bible contains Law and Gospel. The Law tells us both the commands that God has given us and the punishment we deserve for our disobedience of them. The Gospel tells us what Jesus did for us. He was perfect by keeping every commandment perfectly. Jesus died on the cross in my stead and rose three days later conquering death and the devil. There is law in the Old and New testaments and there is Gospel in the old and new testaments as well.

Finally, I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life. Eternal life is ours through faith. As God says, **No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit** (1 Corinthians 12:3). I believe in the one, true, triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works this faith in our hearts through the Scriptures alone. Romans 10:17 tells us, **Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.** In Baptism, the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts. It is not the water that does such things, but God's Word with the water. Baptism too, is a Means of Grace that allows us to enter God's family and become heirs of eternal life. When we were baptized, our sins were forgiven and we were delivered from death and the power of the devil. Titus chapter 3 verses 5-7 reads, **He saves us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.** Without this gift of salvation, we cannot enter eternal life in heaven.

I was baptized when I was very young. My faith has grown over the years by hearing and reading the Word of God. It is important for our faith to grow because the enemy wants to devour us or try to get us to fall away from God. Ephesians 3:16 states, **I pray that out of His glorious riches, He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being.** We need the Holy Spirit to continue His work in us because the world and our own sinful nature and the devil all work to pull us away from God.

The final means of grace is Holy Communion. In the Lord's Supper, we eat bread which is Jesus' body and drink wine which is Jesus' blood to receive the blessings of the forgiveness of sins. It is not the bread and wine, but it is God's Word by which we receive those blessings. Jesus instituted this blessed and important meal on the night he was betrayed by Judas. Mark chapter 14:22-24 states, **While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to His disciples saying, *Take it: this is my body.* Then He took a cup, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. *This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many, He said to them.*** The blessings that we receive from Holy Communion include the forgiveness of sins, new life, and eternal salvation in Christ Jesus, as well as the strengthening and confirmation of our faith. Before the reception of the Lord's Supper, we need to make sure we are prepared by trusting that we are receiving Jesus' true body and blood. Participants of Holy Communion need to be repentant sinners, able to examine themselves, and they need to be one with each other in what they believe and teach. Because of the blessings it promises, we want to partake often in the Lord's Supper.

It means a lot to me to be a member of the Church. There are many privileges involved with being a member of the Church. Although, there are lots of responsibilities to be had as well, privileges of being a member include being a part of God's earthly family and having a support system with other members of the Church. You also have friendships based on the unity of your faith, and a place where you can go and worship to strengthen your faith. Some responsibilities include ushering, voting on different issues, serving in church offices, helping with outreach programs, and helping fellow members with the varied issues they have.

I am motivated to live the way God wants me to out of love and thankfulness for what He has done for us. **God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us** (Romans 5:8). Can you imagine someone that you have disregarded died to save you? Well, that's exactly what Jesus did! How can I not thank and praise Him for all that He has done?

**The peace of our Lord Jesus Christ which transcends all understanding,  
guard and keep your hearts and minds in Him, until life everlasting. Amen.**